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ABSTRACT

This study compared the portrayal of children with disabilities in 15 children's books published prior to and 30 children's books published after 1978 (roughly after implementation of Public Law 94-142, which encouraged mainstreaming of such children). Four teachers rated each book according to a set of 10 statements concerning portrayal of children with disabilities. Findings indicated that more disabilities were portrayed in the books published after 1978, that the variety of disabilities portrayed increased between the two periods, that the post-1978 books were much more realistic than were earlier books, and that post-1978 books showed improved accuracy of information and more appropriate use of terminology. An appendix lists the books in both samples. (DB)

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Portrayal of Handicapped/Disabled Individuals in Children's Literature: Before and After Public Law 94-142

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Portrayal of Handicapped/Disabled Individuals in Children's Literature: Before and After Public Law 94-142

Many educators today can remember vividly when Public Law 94-142 first became operational. The idea behind "main streaming", which soon became accepted educational practice as a result of that legislation, is, of course, that children who are "different" should not be placed in separate classes, or viewed as "not normal," but should be in classes with all the other children. Specifically, the idea included the notion that handicapped children really aren't all that much different from children in general and need to be accepted in the classroom like any others. Some children have brown eyes and others blue to be sure, but really, children, handicapped and non-handicapped, have more in common than differences.

Mainstreaming of handicapped children into regular classrooms and into the regular school routine appears to have been accomplished pretty well. What about materials though? Have handicapped children been "mainstreamed" into children's literature selections as well? Has the portrayal of handicapped children in children's literature changed since the successful implementation of P.L. 94-142? That is the question we decided to investigate.

It's an important question as several writers have pointed out. For example, Morse (1980) claims that books cam promote empathy toward handicapped persons. He says,

> In depicting the human dilemma, a literary account is often more vivid than even our everyday experiences because essentials are winnowed from the ephemeral and highlighted. We are left with the human essence, which carries a meaning far richer and more poignant than one sees in the helter skelter of fortuitous observation. (p. vi)

In order to determine if the portrayal of handicapped children in children's literature has changed in the last 15 years since the advent of the mainstreaming initiative, we randomly selected children's literature book

titles to study. Two samplings were done: 30 titles published after 1978 (roughly after P. L. 94-142) and 15 titles published prior to 1978 (or roughly before P.L. 94-142). This sample of books (see Appendix) was rated by four full-time school teachers who had extensive experience working with children and children's literature materials. Each book in the sample was rated on 10 statements using the following scale:

5 = Almost Always True
4 = More Often Than Not True
3 = Sometimes True
2 = Almost Never True
1 = Never True/Not Applicable

The 10 statements are:

1. Handicapped/disabled children are represented frequently in this book. (Frequency of representation in Tables 1 and 2)

2. Persons with exceptionalities are shown at various reading levels of materials. (Portrayal at various levels in Tables 1 and 2)

3. Handicapped persons are represented accurately and without stereotypes. (Absence of stereotypes in Tables 1 and 2)

4. Disabled persons are shown in least restrictive environment. (Least restrictive environment in Tables 1 and 2)

5. Language is nondiscriminatory. (Nondiscriminatory language in Tables 1 and 2)

6. Interactions are demonstrated between persons with exceptionalities/handicaps and those without exceptionalities. (Interactions between disabled & non-disabled in Tables 1 and 2)

7. Appropriate role models of disabled people are represented. (Appropriate role models in Tables 1 and 2)

8. Emphasis on uniqueness of all individuals is emphasized rather than on focusing on the differences of people with exceptionalities. (Uniqueness of all individuals in Tables 1 and 2)

9. Representation of disabled person has a purpose in the story, i.e. is not a "token" representation. (Purposeful representation in Tables 1 and 2)

10. Illustrations are realistic and portray the disabilities accurately and sensitively. (Realistic illustrations in Tables 1 and 2)

These 10 statements were developed to broadly address the most relevant issues concerning the portrayal and representation of the handicapped in children's literature.

We found that the ratings using these 10 statements proved to be a useful tool in sorting out the portrayal of handicapped/disabled children in books of children's literature. The averaged ratings for children's literature selections published before 1978 and after 1978 are summarized below:

Table 1

Averaged Ratings for 15 Books: Pre-1978 Sample

Statement	Averaged Rating
1. Frequency of Representation	3.7
2. Portrayal at Various Levels	4.0
3. Absence of Stereotypes	3.6
4. Least Restrictive Environment	3.7
5. Nondiscriminatory Language	3.4
6. Interactions Between Disabled & Non-disabled	3.4
7. Appropriate Role Models	3.3
8. Uniqueness of All Individuals	3.3
9. Purposeful Representation	3.8
10. Realistic Illustrations	3.0

The averaged rating for the pre-1978 sample was achieved by summing the ratings for each statement (numbers 1-10) across the 15 books. This provided a total of 15 ratings for each of the 10 statements. The total rating for each of the 10 statements was then divided by 15 to get the averaged rating for each statement for the entire sample of books rated.

The data from the post-1978 sample of literature was analyzed in the same manner as the pre-1978 sample and the results are presented below.

Table 2

Averaged Ratings for 30 Books: Post-1978 Sample

Statement	Averaged Rating
1. Frequency of Representation	4.5
2. Portrayal at Various Levels	5.0
3. Absence of Stereotypes	4.4
4. Least Restrictive Environment	4.3
5. Nondiscriminatory Language	4.5
6. Interactions Between Disabled & Non-disabled	4.4
7. Appropriate Role Models	4.6
8. Uniqueness of All Individuals	4.1
9. Purposeful Representation	4.5
10. Realistic Illustrations	4.4

As can be seen from the data in Tables 1 and 2, the "frequency of representation" of the handicapped/disabled child increased from an averaged rating of 3.7 in the pre-1978 sample to an averaged rating of 4.5 in the post-1978 sample. This shows a notable increase in the "frequency of representation" between the two samples.

The "portrayal at various levels" (portrayal of children with disabilities/handicaps at various reading levels) increased from an average rating of 4.0 in the pre-1978 sample to an averaged rating of 5.0 in the post-1978 sample. The pre-1978 sample was directed mostly towards a reading audience of primary grade children as thirteen of the fifteen books (87%) in

this original sample were written for that reading ability/age level. The post-1978 sample, however, included books for a much wider array of reading levels ranging from the early primary child to the young adolescent. Only five of the thirty books (17%) in the post-1978 sample were designated by the librarian, author, or bookstore staff as being written for the early primary grade/aged child. The remaining 25 books (83%) in the post-1978 sample were designated for intermediate grade children to adolescents, to be read by them or shared with them by parents or other adults as a means of explaining a particular handicapping condition. In addition, the books in the post-1978 sample tended to be both more informative and realistic than their earlier counterparts in the pre-1978 sample in the portrayal of handicapped children.

The "absence of stereotypes" of the handicapped improved from an averaged rating 3.6 in the pre-1978 sample to an averaged rating 4.4 in the post-1978 sample.

Another area that has shown a strong improvement is in the representation of "appropriate role models." The pre-1978 sample had an averaged rating of only 3.3 in this area, however, the post-1978 sample showed an averaged rating of 4.6 in this area. Both the types of illustrations and storylines presented a much stronger and more clearly defined positive variation of role models overall in the post-1978 sample than in the pre-1978 sample.

The "uniqueness of all individuals" was stressed more in the post-1978 sample (average rating of 4.1) than the pre-1978 sample (averaged rating of 3.3). In the pre-1978 sample, many of the characters with handicaps/disabilities seemed to be just "token" characters that were often pitied and had little part in the storyline. For many of the characters portrayed, their handicap and what they could <u>not do</u> were more the focus of the stories rather than the uniqueness and similarities of all people. The

latter was much more evident in the books in the post-1978 sample.

Dramatic changes in "realistic illustrations" of handicapped individuals were also evident between the two samples. The average rating was 3.0 for the pre-1978 sample and 4.4 for the post-1978 sample. The books in the pre-1978 sample were illustrated mostly with drawings and sketches of the characters, and they were often done in drab or muted colors, which added an air of somberness and in some cases a depressing air to the characters and storylines. The books in the post-1978 sample, on the other hand, used mostly real photographs for the illustrations which strongly increased the realistic nature of the books and clearly added to their humanness.

The use of "nondiscriminatory language" improved between the two samples. The pre-1978 sample showed an averaged rating of 3.4 in this area and the averaged rating for the post-1978 sample improved to 4.5. This indicates that less discriminatory language was found in the post-1978 sample.

The averaged rating for the "least restrictive environment" improved from 3.7 in the pre-1978 sample to 4.3 in the post-1978 sample. This means that the frequency of stories taking place in hospitals or clinics decreased from the pre-1978 sample to the post-1978 sample in which most of the stories took place in everyday situations instead of clinical or medical type settings giving the newer stories more realism.

The frequency of depiction of "interactions between disabled and non-disabled" children also improved from the pre-1978 to the post-1978 sample. The pre-1978 sample showed an averaged rating of 3.4 compared to that of 4.4 in the post-1978 sample. The interactions between the disabled and nondisabled in the post-1978 sample were not dependent on the characters needing each other but rather on children just playing and interacting with each other often with no mention of the handicapping condition. They were friends first and the handicap or disability was secondary to the storyline.

"Purposeful representation" also improved between the two samples. The averaged rating in this area in the pre-1978 sample was 3.8 and was improved to 4.5 in the post-1978 sample.

Our study also included an examination of the kinds of handicapping conditions/disabilities portrayed in each of the two samples. The findings of this part of the investigation follow.

Table 3

Disabilities Depicted in 15 Books
Published Prior to 1978

Disability Depicted	Frequency*	Percentage
Blindness/Visual Impairment	5	33%
Deafness/Hearing Impairments	0	00%
Mentally Handicapped	2	13%
Physically Handicapped	4	27%
Leukemia	0	00%
Learning Disability	2	13%
Dyslexia	0	00%
Terminal Illness	0	00%
Dwarfism	0	00%
Diabetes	0	00%
Asthma	0	00%
Emotionally Handicapped	1	07%
Speech Impairments	0	00%
Epilepsy	1	07%

*The frequency totals 15 as each of the selected works only had one disability/handicap portrayed in each selection.

Table 4

Disabilities Depicted in 30 Books
Published After 1978

Disability Depicted	Frequency*	Percentage
Blindness/Visual Impairment	10	30%
Deafness/Hearing Impairments	10	30%
Mentally Handicapped	7	23%
Physically Handicapped	12	40%
Leukemia	1	03%
Learning Disability	4	13%
Dyslexia	1	03%
Terminal Illness	1	03%
Dwarfism	1	03%
Diabetes	1	03%
Asthma	2	07%
Emotionally Handicapped	1	03%
Speech Impairments	2	07%
Epilepsy	0	00%

*The frequency totals more than 30 due to the depiction of multiple handicaps in some of the books.

The data from Tables 3 and 4 show that there were changes in the kinds of disabilities that were represented in the two samples. The pre-1978 sample did not have any books portraying a child that was deaf or hearing impaired; however, there were 10 such books (30%) in the post-1978 sample. This, therefore, indicates a 30 percent increase between the two samples.

The mentally handicapped were portrayed in only two books (13%) in the pre-1978 sample but the percentage in the post-1978 sample increased to 23% with seven books depicting the mentally handicapped in the sample.

The physically handicapped were frequently depicted in both samples, with 27% (4 of 15) in the pre-1978 sample and 40% (12 of 30) in the post-1978 sample. In fact, the physically handicapped were portrayed with the highest percentage of representation of any disabled or handicapping condition in the post-1978 sample.

A very strong similarity in the percentage of representation was shown in one disability between the two samples. This disability is blindness/visual impairment. Blindness/visual impairment was depicted in 33 percent (5 of 15) of the pre-1978 sample and 30 percent (10 of 30) of the post-1978 sample. Even though the percentage of representation was similar between the two samples, the quality and sensitivity to handicapping conditions illustrated in the books in the post-1978 sample far exceeded those in the pre-1978 sample. The characters in the pre-1978 sample were depicted as weak and helpless but those in the post-1978 sample were depicted as strong, self-sufficient, and "making it" in their busy place in the world of sighted and non-sighted friends.

There were no notable changes in the depiction of leukemia, learning disabilities, dyslexia, terminal illness, dwarfism, diabetes, asthma, emotional handicaps, speech impairments, and epilepsy between the pre-1978 and post-1978 samples.

So, what can we conclude about the "mainstreaming" of handicapped children into children's literature since the implementation of P.L. 94-142? Have school materials kept pace with the changes in classrooms and school routines brought about by that momentous law? A number of observations seem warranted.

First, it seems clear that there are more handicaps/disabilities portrayed in children's literature books published after 1978 than before. (It might be best to compare using percentage since the number of books in the

two samples is not the same.) The variety of disabilities portrayed is also greater in the sample of children's literature books published since the advent of P.L. 94-142, that is, after 1978.

Second, the post-1978 sample of children's books is much more realistic than its predecessor. This is true not only in the illustrations, but also in the text. Books in the post-1978 sample are written in a much clearer and direct style so that the characters are portrayed as real people and the use of photographs also enhances this sense of reality. Even in the fictional stories the characters were portrayed as real people and the stories were interesting and informative. In short, this reality aided in portraying the handicapped in a nondiscriminatory manner in the post-1978 sample.

Finally, when one examines books in regard to the image presented of handicapped children and in regard to how useful the books are in terms of their utility in introducing non-handicapped children to children with handicaps or disabilities, two issues become paramount: 1) the accuracy of the information presented; and 2) the terminology used. The post-1978 sample of books in this study shows great gains in providing accuracy of information and in the use of terminology that is informative and yet not too technical.

All in all, it appears that a notable improvement in the portrayal of handicapped/disabled individuals in the books of children's literature, at least from our sample, has been made since the advent of P.L. 94-142.

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Morse, W.C. (1980). The handicapped in literature: A psychosocial perspective. In E. M. Bower (Ed.), Forward (p. vi). Denver: Love Publishing.

APPENDIX

Children's Literature Book Titles Examined.

A total of 15 books published in 1978 or earlier were rated. These books were numbered randomly 1-15 and are listed below in that order.

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	DATE
1.	One Little Girl	Joan Fassler	Behavioral Pub.	1969
2.	The Summer of the Swans	Betsy Byars	Avon Books	1970
3.	Why Have the Birds Stopped Singing?	Zoa Sherburne	Dell	1974
4.	From Anna	Jean Little	Harper & Row	1972
5.	Listen For the Singing	Jean Little	E.P. Dutton	1977
6.	Your Bird is Here	Tom Thompson	Signet	1976
7.	Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack	M.E. Kerr	Dell	1972
8.	Howie Helps Himself	Joan Fassler	Whitman	1975
9.	Rachel	Elizabeth Fanshawe	Bradbury	1975
10.	Deenie	Judy Blume	Bradbury	1973
11.	Katie's Magic Glasses	Jane Godsell	Houghton Mifflin	1965

12.	He's My Brother	Joe Lasker	Whitman	1974
13.	Mine for Keeps	Jean Little	Brown Little Pub.	1962
14.	Mom! I Need Glasses	Angelika Wolff	Lion Pub.	1970
15.	Apt. 3	Ezra Jack Keats	Macmillan	1971

A total of 30 books published after 1978 were rated. These books were numbered randomly 1-30 and are listed below in that order.

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	DATE
1.	Different & Alike	Nancy P. McConnell	Current	1982
2.	We Laugh, We Love, We Cry	Thomas Bergman	Gareth Stevens	1988
3.	One Day At A Time	Thomas Bergman	Gareth Stevens	1988
4.	Finding A Common Language	Thomas Bergman	Gareth Stevens	1988
5.	On Our Own Terms	Thomas Bergman	Gareth Stevens	1988
6.	Seeing In Special Ways	Thomas Bergman	Gareth Stevens	1988
7.	Kevin's Story	Dvora Levinson	IPI Publishing	1984
8.	About Handicaps	Sara Bonnett Stein	Walker & Co.	1985
9.	"L.D." Does NOT Mean Learning Dumb!	Miss Maniet's Class	Upward Bound	1985
10.	What it's like to be me	Disabled Children	Exley	1981
11.	About Physical Disabilities	Joy Wilt Berry	Children's Press	1990
12.	Thinking BIG	Susan Kuklin	Lothrop, Lee & Shepard	1986

13.	Finding A Way: Living with Exceptional Brothers and Sisters	Maxine Rosenberg	Lothrop, Lee & Shepard	1988
14.	My Friend Leslie The Story of a Handicapped Child	Maxine Rosenberg	Lothrop, Lee & Shepard	1983
15.	I'm Not So Different	Barbara Seuling	Western Pub	1986
16.	What If You Couldn't...? A Book About Special Needs	Janet Kamien	C. Scribner & Sons	1979
17.	Rajesh	Curt & Gita Kaufman	Atheneum	1985
18.	AMY The Story of a Deaf Child	Lou Ann Walker	Lodestar	1985
19.	What Is The Sign For Friend?	Judith Greenberg	Franklin Watts	1985
20.	Mom Can't See Me	Sally H. Alexander	Macmillan	1990
21.	More Time To Grow	Sharon Hya Grollman	Beacon Press	1979
22.	Our Brother Has Down's Syndrome	Shelley Cairo	Annick Press	1985
23.	Overcoming Disability	Brian R. Ward	Franklin Watts	1988
24.	Someone Special, Just Like You	Tricia Brown	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	1982
25.	Friends	Terry Berger	Julian Messner	1981
26.	See You Tomorrow, Charles	Miriam Cohen	Greenwillow	1983
27.	Through Grandpa's Eyes	Patricia MacLachlan	Harper & Row	1980
28.	"Seeing" in the Dark	E. R. Montgomery	Garrard	1979
29.	A Contest	Sherry Neuwirth Payne	Carolrhoda Books	1982

30. I Can't Always Hear You	Joy Zelonky	Raintree	1980